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Gallery

The art magazine from Gallery Delta



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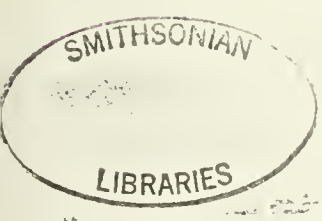
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Nigel Halett

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Artnotes

'What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has nothing but eyes if he is a painter or ears if he is a musician, or a lyre at every level of his heart if he is a poet? Quite the contrary, he is at the same time a political being, constantly aware of what goes on in the world whether it be harrowing, bitter or sweet, and he cannot help being shaped by it.'

The words are from Pablo Picasso, of whom it was said (by his friend and factotum, Sabartés), 'He believes that sadness is conducive to meditation and that pain is the foundation of life.'

In recent years, the business of politics has become central to the lives of Zimbabwean citizens in a way that is without precedent since independence. The conduct of a constitutional referendum and elections; the attendant media coverage, with its accusations and counter-accusations; the personal and domestic consequences of economic decline and decaying social services; these and other factors have touched everyone in the country.

How have our artists responded? As Chiedza Musengezi reports in her review of *Gallery Delta's* pre-election show, 'The young painters explored the way people feel and think by presenting revealing images of what it means to live with degradation, decimation and deprivation.' No one living shoulder to shoulder with increasing poverty can ignore the material and emotional impact of that poverty; those who portray it – whether in paintings or plays or stories – may or may not point fingers of blame, but their representations leave dangling questions which we are bound to address.

The paintings considered by Musengezi are depictions of states of affairs; they tend not to reflect on the processes by which the reality has been arrived at. Chaz Maviyane-Davies, as befits a politically-engaged cultural worker, takes a more analytical and partisan approach. Maviyane-Davies is a designer, a man who uses the power of graphic images to promote a particular position, or message. In advance of the presidential election he repeated his mission of two years ago – to design and circulate a daily 'poster' highlighting the importance of people using their vote to bring about the sort of society they would like to live in. Inevitably, the pressure of such a project will spawn a few failures – images that are slightly too blunt, or too hastily executed; at


his best, though, he combines humanitarian commitment and intellectual rigour with wit and visual artistry to produce compelling images.

Maviyane-Davies is now living and working in the USA, and his departure from Zimbabwe two years ago is a reminder of the migratory trends affecting young people in the visual arts. Other prominent artists will be leaving the country in the months ahead, as *Gallery* will report, but this should not blind us to a countervailing characteristic of the country's artistic community, namely the number of its members who have their origins elsewhere in the world.

Zimbabwe has experienced several waves of immigration over the past hundred years. Helen Lieros, born in the Midlands town of Gweru, talks in these pages of her father's arrival from Greece after the First World War; in the next issue of *Gallery* we will hear from Paul Wade and Thakor Patel, who came more recently from England and India respectively.

How – if at all – does such a move affect one's work as an artist? Like Picasso, we 'cannot help being shaped' by what goes on in our world. But how much of the shaping do we inherit from our origins, or from our parents' origins? As Lieros says, 'you can't take Africa away from me. But you can't also take away my blood, which is Greek.'

How much, in turn, do we acquire from our education and training? Lieros went to school in Gweru and learned her art in continental Europe, but her memories of the latter are punctuated as much by the existential baggage of language and dress and social difference, as they are by details of the academic curriculum.

Such reflections on the multicultural flavour of the visual arts come at a time when nationalism is being given a renewed and vigorous airing in Zimbabwe. In his heartfelt tribute to the late George Churu, Derek Huggins recalls their jesting conversations about national identity. The hint of menace beneath the gloss of good humour derives from official attempts to make political capital out of disenfranchising second-generation Zimbabweans and challenging their rights to full citizenship. The Diaspora may beckon for some, but for many more it is the security of home that needs to be negotiated and won. 

Editor's note

For the recent delays in publishing *Gallery*, we offer all our subscribers and readers a sincere apology. They have arisen in part because of personal work pressures, in part as a result of several regular contributors being out of the country. In order to clear the backlog, this and the next issue will be biannual, rather than quarterly, and we will return to schedule with the December 2002 edition. (Subscriptions will not be affected: those who have paid for four numbered issues will receive them.)

George Churu
School Children
mixed media on paper



Derek Huggins

Painting colourful

A tribute to George Churu

George Churu died in January this year, at the age of thirty-seven. Derek Huggins remembers the man's life and work.

Friday, 8th February, 2002

The word came today that George Churu died on the 29th January at his mother's home in Gokwe North, where he was buried. Helen was at the National Gallery when his half-brother Christopher came in and passed the news. She sobbed. But I have no tears left to cry. I suspected George did not have long to live when I saw him in mid-December, bringing two works for the Summer Exhibition, and again, just before Christmas, when he received a substantial sum of money for recent sales. He was very thankful, and said he was going to visit his mother for the holidays. But he did not look well. His thinking was confused and his speech was slow and I wondered if he would return. The story emerges that en route to Gokwe he left his nine-year-old son Munashe at Kadoma with his maternal grandmother and travelled on. The boy ran away and followed him by bus and foot; it is a long way. Clearly, George became too ill to return and languished at the Gumunya homestead he had bought for his mother. The death certificate refers to 'Natural causes ... swollen body', which could mean anything.

I had a poignant discussion with George three years, to the day, before he died:

Extract from diary notes, Friday 29th January, 1999.

George has been around the Gallery a lot of late, during December

and January, helping at the front office because of Hilary's sudden departure to South Africa. This is not to say that he is not often about anyway. He has been an exhibitor since we first showed him as a student of the BAT Workshop in 1989. He developed as an important painter along with his contemporaries Luis Meque and Richard Witikani, and he has been a participant in all the New and Changing Directions and Crossroads exhibitions, and many others, through the nineties to the present.

In the late eighties and early nineties, George was more inclined to the graphic, and used the silkscreen to good effect. I recall his *Ice Cream Vendors* from those times and noted his potential. After finishing at the BAT Workshop he went to work as an illustrator with David Martin at Zimbabwe Publishing House for about three years, and inevitably his development as a painter, in comparison with Luis Meque, was slower. He worked full time as a painter when he left ZPH in about 1994, and his development quickened. It has been a pleasure to have George working daily at the gallery. He is punctual, responsible, adept and so very charming and good-natured. He possesses a customary cheerfulness and a frequent smile and laugh. We have been seeking the opportunity to offer him a one-person show for a couple of years. Last year he was scheduled to show at the National Gallery but his show there was postponed several times and so he is due and ready to show with us in mid-February. We



Derek Huggins



Derek Huggins

(above) George Churu
Divorced Woman, 1996
mixed media on paper

(left) George Churu
Railway Property, 1998
mixed media on paper

have been through the works, made the selection and are organising the framing, the photography and the brochure. George is very excited by the prospect and he was busy most of the day on Wednesday attending to the updating of his biography with young Richard Wiles at the computer, and masking and titling his slides...

At the end of a good and busy day after the exhibition of the night before – the Young Artists' Exhibition 1999 – I was in my office, trying to clear and order the paper littering my desk, when George came in. It was clear that he wanted to talk. He sat in the chair on the other side of my desk, his eyes intent and searching for my reaction, his hair close-cropped at the sides making his round face look smaller, and I wondered if it was the haircut that made his face look thinner or whether he had lost some weight.

'I want to tell you my story,' said George. 'There are some things I want you to know. Some things you should know.' It was an unusual opening for a speech by one of the artists. I sensed that he was about to volunteer something important to me. Normally it is 'I have a problem', which ultimately means a money problem, but I knew it was not a financial one, as George had sold very well over the last few months. I was immediately arrested and attentive and discarded any thought of attending to administrative matters. I was, to say the least, curious as to what was to come.

'You tease me about being a Mozambican,' said George. 'It is not true to say I am a Mozambican. I was born in Mbari, here in Harare, of Mozambican parents from Manica Province.'

'What I say, George, is that our best painters have got foreign blood. Luis was Mozambican, Hilary has got Zulu blood, Richard is of Malawian parents, Ishmael had Malawian parents also, Fasoni had, I think, Ndebele blood. You are of Mozambican parentage. Who are the true blood Shona's amongst us?'

George looked thoughtful and fell silent for a moment.

'My mother is Agnes Churu. She was born in Mozambique. She married a man from the same province. She had two sons. I was the youngest. When I was about two years old, in about 1966, my brother and I were sent to my grandmother in Manica Province in Mozambique. I schooled there. My brother was to die there in 1983. I stayed there until 1979 when I came back and rejoined my mother who was at the time living on a farm at Macheke. My mother had remarried and I have two step-brothers and one step-sister. My own father had disappeared when I was very small. He had gone 'penga' and gone wandering. You know, like the men that shout aloud on the streets.'

I nodded. They can be seen sometimes in dirty, oil and grime thick rags, with long hair and wild eyes, talking and shouting to themselves and anybody else who cares to listen and understand, but nobody does and everybody shuns them as fearful to behold. An African tramp.

'I continued schooling at Nhowe Mission near Macheke. I was always good at art. From a small boy I always had the desire to draw. I left school in 1985 and came to Harare and stayed with family friends in Mabelreign where I did the chores and looked after the garden. I applied to the BAT Workshop. There was opposition to this from my hosts but I got accepted. I had to wait a year before I could commence my studies. So I waited and got admission in 1987, for three years. It was difficult. It was a struggle...

'After the BAT Workshop I joined ZPH as an illustrator and I got married to Shelly in 1991. We lived in Highfields and we had one son, Munashe, who was born in 1992. Shelly and I were to separate and divorce, and Shelly died in September last year, as you know...'

I nodded affirmation. Shelly had gone to South Africa selling crafts and had disappeared without word or trace for months, leaving George holding the baby and giving him much consternation and worry. When she returned, things were not the same, and they parted company. Shelly had come to the gallery in mid-1998 looking thin and emaciated, and in need of money to go home to Mhondoro, where she died a few months later. She was young; no older than George.

'When I was at the BAT Workshop I found God and peace of mind,' George continued. 'My mind opened. God created Heaven and Earth and He said, "It is good to look at." And God said he created man in His image. We are small Gods and I thought to create something. Like if you see my landscapes you see what I see. When I was at school it was good but I needed to go further and study and to search more. Paul Wade and Martin van der Spuy were my teachers. You know. They said if you want to be a good artist go and look at Picasso. They said he was a good artist and illustrator and he knew everything. So I looked at Picasso and that gave me that desire to love my art and I knew I was going to be an artist. I wanted to create works that would last and have permanence. My life has been good since those days at the BAT Workshop, being an artist. Luis was my best friend. He was a cool guy. He didn't talk very much but we helped each other with the painting.'

'While I was at ZPH I thought about my direction. I left the graphic and the silkscreen in 1993 because people were copying me. I found the new direction that year with the *Mother and Child* painting which was colourful and which I painted at Kadoma.'

George had come to the gallery at about this time with a sketch book which was full of small collaged strips which he had cut from magazines and which he had put together in forms, mostly figures, painted in bold colours with diagonal lines and strokes which created tensions, abstracting and moving away from reality and into cubism. These small works helped him focus on his task and saw him into a new direction. Both Helen and I got excited at the time with his breakthrough.

'David Martin has got a big painting in his office. The subject is a policeman. Do you remember it?'

'George, I can't remember that painting offhand.'

'Well, it was through your encouragement. It helped me to know how to carry on.'

He fell silent. It was twilight outside and nearly dark inside but I didn't move to switch on the light. I did not want to interrupt the moment. I could still see his eyes shining bright and glistening in the half-light. I was touched.

'When I painted that *Mother and Child* I felt strongly in my heart about my direction in my life and to be a painter. If you are an artist you must know where you are going. It's like these young artists – some of them are as being in an industry instead of being an artist. The problem is to survive as being an artist.'

'George, tell me what you feel about your fellow man? We are calling your show *Churu's World – Man, the Land, the Future*.'

'Man? God loves people. I love people. I received God's Word in 1986 and I preach to the people at church. I am painting a crucifixion. I will bring it soon. It is big. It is for that big frame in the store, I have measured it. I want to show it for the exhibition. I have painted the nuns and the sisters. Christ died for us, suffered for us, and so I am painting the crucifixion. I think it is good.'

'And the land, George? What of the land?'

'When I look at the landscape which God created I think to myself it is beautiful. In the Bible it says, "When God saw it he said to himself: It is not good to leave it. We must make man rule over it." It was God's love. We are like God. We must know ourselves to love God and to love and appreciate the land.'

'George, tell me about the future.'

'We must know every time, that Jesus said before he died, "When I go to my Father I shall come back and collect you. So get ready and love each other, not hurt each other." How can we do otherwise? Not to love each other when we are told to love each other? You cannot love God without loving people. We are not going to last long here. If you have a vision on your life, when you are called by God – you know about that – then you know that God loves everybody and everybody should love God, the whole world.'

I am very moved by his words. My heart is touched. I see in the near darkness that his eyes are glistening with tears and I know mine are too, and I know that he can see this, and he knows that I can see this. I ask in a choked voice,

'And your mask-like faces, George, tell me about them. That comes from the cubist abstraction?'

'I looked at Picasso. He was dividing the face into parts. But I looked at the Nyau dance masks. That is where I found what we had here in Africa, from Malawi, Zambia and west Africa, is better than from elsewhere. It made me think how he, Picasso, came to find those African masks, so I said to myself I must look within Africa and make work from Africa. I know my culture.'

'And the futuristic structures and forms in your paintings, in your landscapes? Is this man's intrusion into the landscape? Is this industry and development? Does this concern you?'

'God made the world colourful. I like to paint colourful like he did. The portraits – when I walk around in town I see people with different moods. If I paint a figure, a person, they may be sad or they may be happy. We are not happy every day. In life I see those things. I paint those things. I try to reflect the mood and the spirit of the person.'

George goes quiet. He sits and reflects. So do I. It is late. It is dark. It is time to go home.

'Thank you, Derek, for all you have done for me,' says George. 'You have helped me so much to be a painter.'

'There's no need to thank me, George. We have helped each other. You help the gallery. You are a good painter. You are part of the group. You help me make a living also.'

George rises. 'I am going now.'

'I shall be very interested to see your crucifixion.'

'I shall bring it. I shall bring it in a few days. God bless you, Derek.'

'And you too, George.'

He walked off through the darkened gallery. I am worried about him. I have been fearful for him ever since learning that Shelly died. I feel like weeping. He is seeing the doctor. He is on medication. He said that he is coughing a lot at night.



Derek Huggins

(above) George Churu
Mother Land, 2001
oil on canvas

(opposite top) George Churu
Mountains, 1996
mixed media on paper

(right) George Churu
Winter Landscape, 1997
mixed media on paper



Derek Huggins



Derek Huggins

Three years later, to the day, another important Zimbabwean painter deceased. His age: thirty-seven years. He joins the list of young painters around us who have died during the last four years, and has followed his contemporaries – Ishmael Wilfred, Luis Meque, Fasoni Sibanda and Hilary Kashiri – to the grave. The earliest surviving members of the group from the beginning of the nineties are Richard Witikani and Shepherd Mahufe. George's actual cause of death is not known but the affliction that hastened his demise can be guessed. Tragedy abounds in this country. The people are in stress with Aids and its effects, and under duress with political oppression and economic decline.

I remember so clearly that evening three years ago. It was touching and very special. We were very close at that moment and the moment lives on. I am glad that I noted it at the time and I want to share it, however sad it is, for George's sake.

I have in my mind's eye his last painting, *Mother Land*, submitted for the Summer Exhibition in December. It is George's last statement about Africa. George was deeper thinking, and more knowing and sensitive, than many realised. He knew, I think, that he was very ill and that he might not have long to live. The painting, in strident colours, depicts a woman standing erect, and clasping six small children to her breast. She is severe and sad. Her eyes shed tears. She cries for the land, for the hundreds and thousands of orphans, for Munashe – yet another orphan – and for George himself. 6

‘The Beacons’

Zimbabwean painting in the last fifty years

Derek Huggins

Europe, that Mecca of every painter, chose to ignore contemporary painting in Zimbabwe to favour instead the advent and propagation of ‘Shona’ sculpture (more latterly termed ‘Zimbabwean Stone Sculpture’). The sculpture fitted the European vision of Africa, and even if its ‘authenticity’ as a contemporary movement was in doubt, it was the realisation of an artistic expression of the people. Painters were inhibited by the politics of the times: the ‘winds of change’ in the colonies; the antagonism against the obdurate ‘white settlers’; the isolation caused by the imposition of sanctions in 1965 and the ensuing conflict and war; the Western trend to favour conceptual and installation art at the expense of painting; and the financial success of the ‘Shona’ sculpture which gained it more adherents than the painting. Yet the painting has as much, if not more, relevance and importance in providing the clues that trace and link the country’s visual art history and its bridges to the present. It presents an interesting story of the self determination and labour of a few for the inherent love and need for self expression in art despite personal hardship.

Imagine a swathe of land, of savannah grass, woodlands and scrub broken by lumpy granite hills and rocky outcrops, in the heart of southern Africa, bordered by the Zambesi River in the north and the Limpopo in the south, the highlands in the east and the desert of the Kalahari to the west. This land was occupied by indigenous people: the Ndebele, an offshoot of the Zulu, in the south, and the Shona in the north. Imagine, too, the coming of the white man, borne by ox-wagon in the 19th century: the missionary, the adventurer explorer, the hunter, the gold and diamond seekers, the traders and the pioneers; and the establishment, by the end of the century, of a colonial administration in the name of the Queen over the land which was called Southern Rhodesia, and the encouragement, in the twentieth century, of immigration from Britain. Visualise the establishment of a rail and road network and the growth of a few modern towns and cities in the midst of the undulating veld, interspersed by tribal trust lands and cattle ranches and farms for maize and tobacco and cotton.

The two World Wars brought economic crisis but by the 1950s there was new vigour and growth with the establishment of the Federation of Southern and Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The Kariba Dam was built, providing cheap power to the region and the beginnings of prosperity for a colony finding its feet. But all was not well within the new colony and the next fifty years are marked with the rise of African nationalism, the achievement of Independence in 1980 and the years of post-independence adjustment. Yet within all of the politics and the conflict, life went on and artists strove to effect their purpose and their will.

It is to Canon Edward ‘Ned’ Paterson, an Anglican priest with missionary vision and zeal, that tribute is accorded for the establishment of the first ‘school of contemporary African painting’ in the young colony. Paterson, born in Scotland, was raised and educated in Johannesburg in South Africa and, after being ordained and practising as a priest there, was soon to be given the challenge, in 1938, of establishing a mission in an outlying district of Matabeleland, the southern-most province, near Bulawayo. He set

to work, calling the mission Cyrene and being of the conviction that art, in which he was a keen amateur, gave confidence and individuality to his pupils; he established an art class which became, by the fifties, the ‘Cyrene School’ of painting. The subject matter was inevitably biblical and religious; it was mainly painting but included also carving in wood and ‘wonder stone’, which Paterson imported from England. The chapel was decorated with murals. The British Queen visited Cyrene Mission in 1947 and the ‘School’ was given the privilege of a major exhibition in London in 1949. Contemporary African painting in Southern Rhodesia had been born. Some of the names of the most gifted pupils of their time were: John Balopi, Livingstone Sango and Samuel Songo.

Paterson left Cyrene and settled in the capital Salisbury, now Harare, and established Nyarutsetso Art Centre in the teeming suburb of Mbare. It was not, however, to gain acclaim or prominence. The new-found confidence of the fifties saw the building of the Rhodes National Gallery in the capital in 1957, under the patronage of Sir Stephen Courtauld. Frank McEwen was its first director. The beginning of ‘Shona Sculpture’, so named by McEwen, emerged soon after, and attracted overseas interest that has lasted up to the present day. The painting became secondary, despite efforts by McEwen to stimulate a contemporary African painting school in the 1960s. The painters around McEwen’s Workshop, including Thomas Mukarobgwa, opted for the more lucrative sculpture.

At the beginning of the fifties, however, there was an important artist in the making amongst the plethora of amateur western painters, most of whom who were clamoring to capture idyllic Africa in water colours. He was Robert Paul. Born in London in 1906 and educated at a private school in the west of England, he sailed for Africa in 1927 and became a trooper with the British South Africa Police for a few years during which time he patrolled in the Midlands Province on horseback as a cartographer. He was seconded to the army and later worked on the tobacco floors. As a young man in England he had come into contact with John Piper and his contemporaries, with whom he had painted on excursions into the countryside. He continued to nurture the desire to paint, and to paint Africa. In 1951 he resolved to live as a full time painter. His passions and subjects were the landscape of Inyanga in the Eastern Highlands, an area of hills and undulating downs sliced by rivers and streams and pocketed by dams, and, when on holiday with his family, the wild Transkei coast in South Africa. The early colonial buildings in the city did not escape his keen eye. He worked with water colour, oils and egg tempera. Tall, distinguished, quick-witted, hard-drinking, cigarette-smoking Robert Paul painted seriously for thirty years until his death in 1980. He, more than any other landscape painter the country has known, captured the light and shadow on the veld, its depth and breadth and uninterrupted vastness and the spirit of place.

Marshall Baron was to emerge, in the sixties, as a major abstract expressionist painter. Born in 1934 in Bulawayo, the second city in the south of the country, he was a brilliant scholar with a deep love of music and art. After studies in Cape Town he became a lawyer and practiced in Bulawayo. Concurrently, he was an art and music critic, a liberal and humanitarian, and a critic of the Rhodesian Government. It was a decade which saw the rise of African



(left) John Balopi
Cyrene, 1943
34 x 51cm, poster paint

(middle) Robert Paul
Inyanga Landscape, 1959
65 x 79cm, oil and egg tempera

(below) Marshall Baron
Rain Thoughts (undated)
150 x 245cm
acrylic on canvas



nationalism in Bulawayo under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo, and the banning of the nationalist parties as they formed and reformed – the NDP, PCC, PF-ZAPU and ZANU-PF – with the consequent civil disobedience, restrictions and detentions, disorder and riots throughout the country. There followed the dissolution of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and the coming to power of Ian Smith and the Rhodesian Front, the unilateral declaration of independence in 1965 and the imposition of United Nations sanctions. Baron's father was a first cousin of Ben Shahn, the American painter, who took an interest in his development, inviting him on three occasions to America between 1966 and 1968 to attend the Skowhogan Annual School of Art in Maine. He once said of his work which, it seems, he referred to as impressionism: 'Abstract impressionism has found and is exploring the realm of the spirit. Creatively, it has more in common with music than conventional art which is bound by the limitations of the subject. Abstract impressionism is as free as thought.' Marshall Baron was attuned to the developments in painting in the West and was ahead of his time in the midst of Africa. Painting large abstract canvases in Bulawayo in the sixties and early seventies made him the most controversial and misunderstood painter of the decade and he was subjected to as much ridicule as praise. He was, however, an enormous influence on two young artists, Stephen Williams and Rashid Jogee. Marshall Baron died suddenly in Bulawayo in 1977 at the age of forty-two, leaving a body of huge canvases for which there were few collectors.

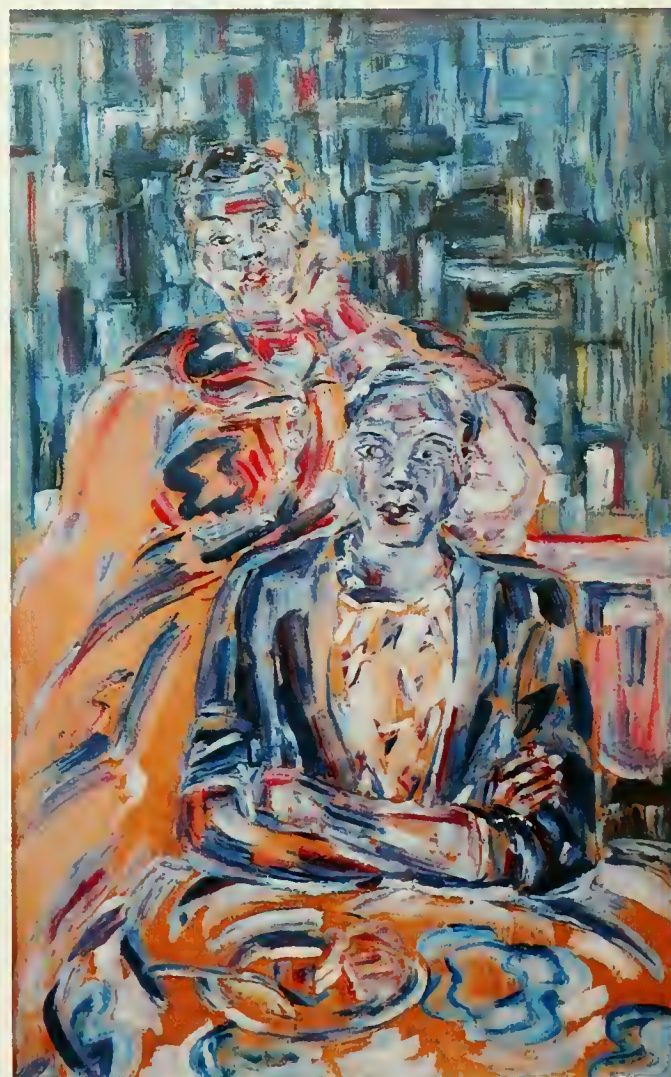
From the neo-romanticism of Robert Paul to the abstract expressionism of Marshall Baron to the naive, folkloric spell of Thomas Mukarobgwa. The latter, for all of his working life, was an attendant at the National Gallery from its opening in 1956 until shortly before his death in 1999. He was one of a group of untutored young painters around Frank McEwen and the Workshop School of late fifties and sixties. A Shona by tribe, he was born near Rusape in 1924. Short and rotund, he was well known to many for his open face, cheerful demeanour, broad and happy smile and infectious laughter. And for his keen interest in the traditions of his people. He was raconteur and musician. He told the stories passed down by oral tradition and he delighted in playing the *chipendani* (a string bow played with the mouth) at any given opportunity or exhibition opening. He painted with oils on board or canvas with an impasto-like touch and depicted the people and mythical beings and creatures, the ancestors and spirits in landscapes of valleys and mountains. It appeared that he grew disillusioned with painting in the seventies in sanctioned and war-torn Rhodesia and turned to sculpting lumpy, rounded beings and creatures. He returned to painting with gusto in the last decade of his life.

In contrast to Mukarobgwa, working in the same epoch, was the painter Kingsley Sambo. He came from Rusape District where, it seems, his favourite place was the bar at the Balfour Hotel where he painted a mural which is long since obliterated. Sambo was intrigued with the ebb and flow of the people around him in the modern capital city. He drew with a good and sensitive line and painted the people, dancing or at rest in the bars and restaurants, in oils on board or on canvas. He painted the landscape also, often in thick impasto with brush or spatula. Clearly, he was an admirer of Van Gogh. He painted studies of people, giving them individuality and stature, and in all of this he anticipated the work of Luis Meque and Richard Witikani in the nineties. The seventies was a decade of armed conflict. In 1977 Kingsley Sambo was shot and killed by nationalist guerrillas at his home in the Rusape District.

This decade saw the emergence in the capital of two other major painters: Henry Thompson and Helen Lieros. Henry Thompson was born on a farm in the Karoo near Kuruman in South Africa, close to the then Bechuanaland (now Botswana) border on the edge of the Kalahari desert. A childhood accident had left him without a right arm. His family moved to Southern Rhodesia in 1949 and he worked for many years with the City authorities. He was an admirer of McEwen, and particularly of his International Congress of African

(top) Thomas Mukarobgwa
Old Man Afraid to Cross, 1961
70 x 91cm

(bottom) Kingsley sambo
Sipo and Nandi, 1965
92 x 58cm, oil on board



Culture (I.C.A.C.) exhibition of the early sixties and an early Annual Exhibition in which the vibrant colours of the huge abstract canvases of Marshall Baron leapt across the space. He was a self taught, thoughtful artist who utilised his weekends and holidays painting, shut in a wooden shed in his garden in the long heat of the day. Concerned and vocal as he always was about the politics and the perils of the country, he chose to immerse himself in literature and painting which was his escape from the reality of the harshness and underlying tensions of the times. His medium was oil and acrylics on paper and canvas and his subject matter was, in the main, the abstracted landscape. His delight was to visit the coffee houses of the city and to talk about art and artists, local or international. He admired the work of Matisse, Max Beckman and Willem de Kooning. 'The Cafe' became a theme for his work, following excursions to the coast, as did 'Mozambican Summers'. He ventured, in the mid nineties, to paint a series of works on Robert Paul's 'sacred' ground and succeeded. Fondly recalled is his self portrait with cloth cap pulled hard down over his forehead and complete with a right arm against the backdrop of an Inyanga scene. He died suddenly and unexpectedly a few days before Christmas 1998 at the age of seventy.

Helen Lieros, born in Gweru, a town in the Midlands Province, is of very different antecedents. Her father, born on the island of Serifos in the Cyclades in 1900 and orphaned soon afterwards, went to sea at the beginning of the First World War and finally came ashore at Cape Town in 1924. He found his way to Southern Rhodesia and settled. His fiancée by correspondence left Athens in 1939 to marry him. Despite being raised in an English-speaking colony Lieros's first languages were Greek, which her mother insisted she spoke fluently, and Chikeranga, which she learnt from the domestic helper. It is little wonder that the Greek connection remains indelible. She is a Mediterranean woman born in Africa in whom the conflict of roots and culture and identity occurs. Forced by family misfortunes to return to Africa in the early sixties after five years of art studies in Geneva and Florence she was demoralised and crushed in spirit. A commission to paint murals in the Greek Orthodox Church brought her to the capital in 1967. Lieros, in her own words, 'really began to paint' in the early seventies when she found the colour and spirit of Africa and began to get beneath its surface. She works with oils, pigments and collage. The conflict and war in the country and the early death of her younger sister affected her deeply and brought emotional, symbolic and expressionist responses in her work. And so too the perplexing influences of Europe and Africa through which she has sought to solve the dilemma of her own identity of being born, not only a white in Africa but of a minority group of Greek blood, sometimes leaning to Africa and at other times to Europe and Greece. Hence her 'Inheritance' series of the mid nineties. Another series, 'Logos - The Word', in 1998 stemmed from a commission to undertake wall paintings in the Orthodox Cathedral at Maputo in Mozambique on which she has worked twice a year for the past six years. She continues to live and work in Harare where is also known for her work as a teacher, promoter and philanthropist.

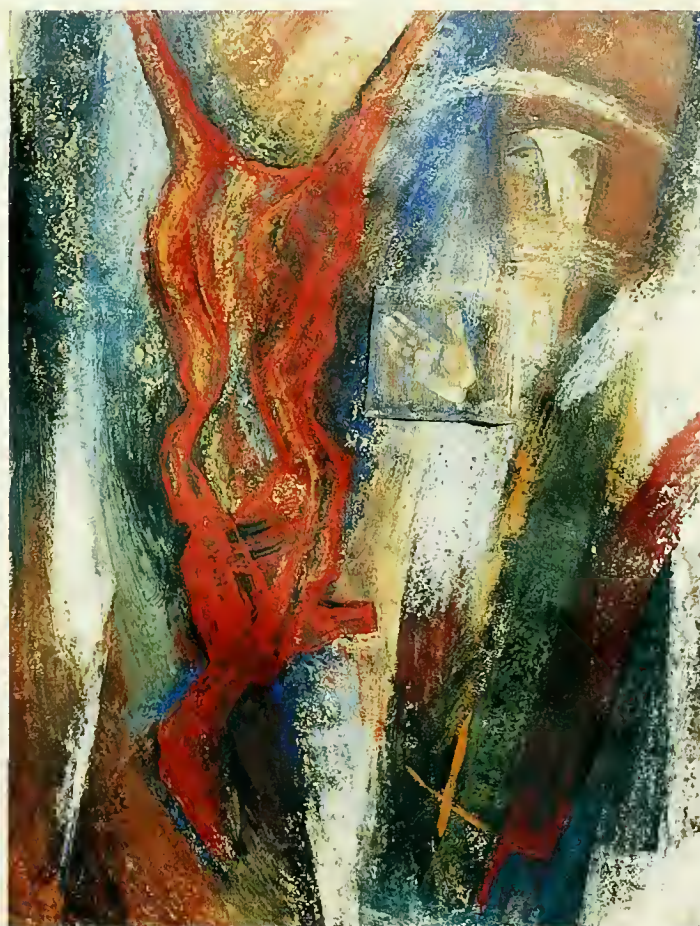
Independence in 1980 came after fifteen years of sanctions and eight years of war; with the peace Zimbabwe aspired to a brighter future and to be, once again, a partner in the world. It was a time of new energy and enthusiasm. The country, at the change, was an economic leader in black Africa. The potential was enormous. A policy of reconciliation had been aired, but it was marred by relentless references to colonialism, and by disunity in Matabeleland (a ruthless campaign subdued and stamped out the malcontents, and 'unity' was sealed in 1987 between the two major political parties). Two painters, Stephen Williams and Rashid Jogee, both of whom were firmly rooted in Bulawayo, came to recognition in these times.

Stephen Williams was born in South Wales and came with his parents to Bulawayo in 1956 when he was eight. He became an educationalist and teacher, an administrator and promoter and in the midst of everything else, a painter. Inspired by Marshall Baron, with

Henry Thompson
The Red Fez, 1985
76 x 76cm, acrylic on canvas



Derek Huggins



Alan Allen

Helen Lieros
Sacrificial Goat, 1995
124 x 158cm, mixed media

whom he exhibited in the mid-seventies, he was a liberal and activist in support of the nationalist cause in the liberation struggle. He commemorated the veteran nationalists in a series of silk screens in the early eighties. Feeling deeply for Africa, it was the landscape in which he became engrossed and which he sought to minimise and abstract to its essence: vigorous and vibrant renderings of the Matabeleland and Botswana landscape, with bones in the sand; strident and jagged, lightning-like, abstract paintings. Tragically, at the age of forty-seven and at the height of his career – he was then director of the National Gallery in Bulawayo – he died after a motor cycle accident in 1996.

His friend and contemporary, Rashid Jogee, was born in Bulawayo in 1951 of Indian ancestors who had settled originally in the Cape. Following high school, a period in textile design, and a course in applied art and design at the Bulawayo Technical College, he has lived as an ardent yet impoverished painter, in an old house on Fort Street. It is a paint-spattered studio and store littered from front door to back. His contact with Marshall Baron was significant in his development as an abstract expressionist painter, as was his friendship with Stephen Williams. During the course of the war as a reluctant conscript – he was a medic – he was traumatised and suffered a breakdown. In many respects he is an action painter and a performance artist, painting big and colourful canvases in a gestural manner and over-painting time and again as his mood and temperament suggests, allowing the colourfields to permeate body and soul.

The 1990s was a decade of increasing economic difficulties: a crippling drought for the first four years when it seemed it would never rain properly again; expedient fiscal policies causing devaluation and inflation; the uncertainty evoked by the politics of land reform resulting in the designation of hundreds of commercial farms for resettlement in 1997; and the intervention and involvement in a war in the Congo. Artistically, however, the decade belongs to Luis Meque and Ishmael Wilfred.

Early in the 1980s, recognising the disproportionate emphasis on stone sculpture compared to painting and in an effort to correct the imbalance, Christopher Till established the BAT Workshop under the auspices of the National Gallery of which he was then director. The Workshop offered a two-year diploma course in drawing, painting and sculpture. By the end of the decade there were a few young artists of talent and promise who were intent on being painters.

Luis Meque was born at Tete on the bank of the Zambezi River in Mozambique in 1966. He was brought up and schooled in the port of Beira. In the early eighties, desire for an art education and travel led to him to sign a form which promised an overseas scholarship.



Derek Huggins

Instead, he found himself in the government militia and was for several years involved in a civil war and combating the rebels of the resistance movement in the north of the country. There came a day in 1986 when he deserted, sold his rifle and uniform and bought a ticket home. He then fled to Zimbabwe as a refugee. He found a place at the BAT Workshop in 1988 but was expelled after one year for a misdemeanor. He persisted, however, and became a painter and the leader of a group of young contemporary artists around Gallery Delta. Quiet and gentle of disposition, of kind and generous manner, he was reckless with his own life. He frequented the cafes and bars of the city which became the subject of many of his works. A keen observer with a quick hand and line, he sketched and painted the people in their daily activities making reference to many social concerns: unemployment, street kids, the workers and strikes, prostitution and Aids. He once said: 'I am black. I think black. I paint black.' He was hard working, indeed prolific, and painted fluently with a seemingly spontaneous, even nonchalant, ease. Afflicted by Aids and suffering from Kaposi's sarcoma he died in the casualty ward of the city hospital in 1998. Luis Meque was the key to a new group and a new movement in contemporary painting. That which Kingsley Sambo had sought to capture was realised in full measure by Meque.



Derek Huggins

(above) Stephen Williams
Late Rain, 1986
150 x 150cm, oil on Canvas

(right) Rashid Jogee
Goodbye Cruel World - Revisited, 1985
120 x 180cm, oil on Canvas

Ishmael Wilfred was also a student of the BAT Workshop. He was born of Malawian descent at Banket. In the early part of the decade he was depicting the streets and houses of Mufakose, the high-density area in which he lived, but his work lacked content and direction as is almost inevitable in the early development of any young painter. Later, however, touched on the myth and spiritual beliefs of his people; it was a response to a strange, disconcerting and painful growth on the bone of his lower jaw, like an extra tooth. He was to undergo no less than five operations over a period of three years, during which he surrendered, piece by piece, his entire lower jaw. During this period Ishmael painted out the drama and the trauma that he was suffering. He saw himself as a sacrificial victim, being attacked and devoured by cannibalistic evil spirits and demons. His bold paintings, in vibrant, indeed strident, colour, are desperate and tortured statements of reconciliation with his affliction and coming death; at the same time, they reveal and fix in the light, the evil that he saw and felt. In the intensity of his pain and despair he poured his feelings into his expressionist paintings and in doing so broke from tradition and revealed subject and content not seen before in such manner and clarity. Small and slight of stature and of gentle disposition, he was courageous in his long suffering and brave until the end. At the age of twenty-nine, he died of a cancerous tumour in March 1998 the day before his first one-man exhibition 'The Spirit Lives' and ten days before the passing of Luis Meque.

Ten painters have been identified. It was not difficult to make the selection. All were born or firmly rooted in the country. All devoted their lives to the pursuit of art, some with an awareness of western trends and fashions, some without, but all working to effect their individual expression. All have made significant contributions to the development of contemporary painting. Some are of international stature and all would be recognised as good painters anywhere. Eight are already dead and all died within the country of their birth or adoption; it might appear, then, that there remains a dearth of painters and painting in Zimbabwe. But this is not so. Throughout the period and in every decade there has been intense artistic activity. There were other painters who came and went, or who came when mature and remain, and those who are more newly embarked, some of whom could have been discussed in a broader and longer review. For example, the sixties saw the involvement of Tom Maybank, Trevor Wood, Jean Hahn and Josephine O'Farrell; and the eighties Thakor Patel and Simon Back; and there was a revolution in the nineties as young black artists took to painting: Luis Meque, Richard Witikani, George Churu, Hilary Kashiri, Fasoni Sibanda, Shepherd Mahufe, James Jali and Lovemore Kambudzi and during which time Paul Wade made his debut as a painter.

The new millennium has brought political and economic crises, as the real and psychological battle for the land and power gathers pace, all cast in the shadow of an Aids endemic. The torments and the writhings have returned. The advances in contemporary painting are jeopardised. Greater external exposure and new markets need be found. Perhaps most of the best of the painting has come and gone with the old century? Only the passing of the time will answer this. Throughout the history of mankind the migration of peoples and the collision of cultures has occurred: clashing or juxtaposing, integrating or disappearing. Yet influences occur and traces are left to intrigue and to become history. Even when history is deliberately rewritten to erase and eradicate one or the other culture, it is the arts that are indelible and provide the beacons that mark the way from past to present. Today the western influences are increasingly being swept away as the tide of indigenisation floods ever more rapidly and another migration occurs. Yet the hope remains that there will always be good painters and that those who have survived into the new century will continue to strive and the new young will mature and do justice to their epochs and be remembered. ♡

This article first appeared in *Kunst aus Zimbabwe*, Iwalewa Haus and Kunstmuseum Bayreuth catalogue, 2001



Alan Allen

Ishmael Wilfred
Bearing the Offspring, 1997
mixed media on paper



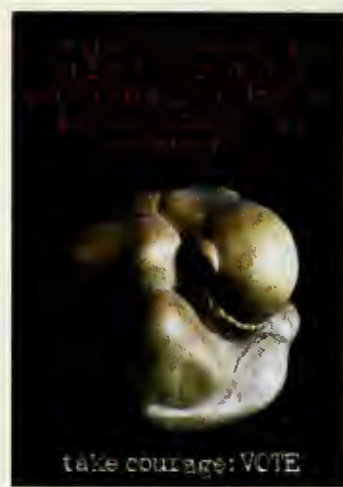
Luis Meque
Friends - Free at Last, 1998
186 x 115cm, mixed media and collage 13



03



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During February and March this year, Zimbabwean graphic designer Chaz Maviyane-Davies held a major exhibition of his work in Boston. At the time, he was repeating his project of two years ago – creating a daily pre-election graphic image which he circulated electronically as a contribution to Zimbabwe's political development.

Al Gowan, Professor of Design at Massachusetts College of Art, recalls Maviyane-Davies' opening lecture, and reviews the exhibition.

The lecture

I had the pleasure of introducing Maviyane-Davies, who has been teaching graphic design at Mass Art since January 2001. Chaz was inspired as a student in London by Victor Papanek's book, *Design for the Real World*. Chaz believes design is a powerful tool for social and political change. He showed slides of the work done in Harare, including his Graphic Commentaries, sent out daily on the web for the thirty days preceding the 2000 parliamentary elections.

Of his work, Maviyane-Davies said, "I have always felt that Zimbabwean daily life can communicate dignity, and gain respect for who we are, if used creatively and effectively. I have tried in my work to form a new visual language that is able to redeem some of our heritage and individual spirit, whilst offering a new vitality, and greater appreciation for our diversity to the entire world. In order to do this, I believe in transforming constraint and lack of resources into opportunity. This means using our own images, resources and materials to their fullest potential, even though our western education makes us regard them as inferior."

I noticed students and teachers of colour in the audience nodding in agreement.

In every graphic design Chaz Maviyane-Davies makes, especially his renowned series on the United Nations articles of human rights, the images are both powerful and positive. Beautiful, muscular black men and women exude confidence and calm in their resolution.

Others have called Chaz Maviyane-Davies the Guerilla of Graphic Design. To that deserved accolade, I would add another – the John Heartfield of our time.

His last slide was a preview of the first in a new series, Portal of Truth, graphic statements to make the world aware of Mugabe's desperate attempt to retain the presidency in the coming election. A passenger jet with the ruling party's insignia on the fuselage hurls itself through a dawn sky toward the great stone tower that is the symbol and namesake of Zimbabwe. Chaz puts out a new image every day, again for thirty days, leading up to the new election in mid-March.

That snowy night, the entire audience leapt to their feet and gave Chaz Maviyane-Davies a standing ovation. We were applauding more than the work; we were applauding the man and his commitment and courage. We sensed history was being made.

Human Rights Human Lives

When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.

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The exhibition

Chaz Maviyane-Davies is used to adversity, so he took with grace and humour the sudden snow storm that officially closed Massachusetts College of Art two hours before his long-awaited exhibition and lecture. As a tribute to the power of his work, his reputation among his colleagues and students plus the long arm of AIGA's mailing list, the exhibition reception in the President's Gallery was packed. By 6.45 pm, the AIGA lecture had drawn over three hundred people although both driving and walking in Boston were perilous. Some who phoned the College were told the lecture was cancelled. Others made it across town only to be turned away by misinformed security staff. We hope they visited the exhibition before it closed.

This show was a retrospective of fifty-seven works dating from his student days to the present. A 1980 poster entitled *Palestine: A Homeland Denied*, utilised a black and white line drawing of a Palestinian head-dress which changes into barbed wire as it approaches the faceless head of its wearer. Long before computers or Photoshop, Chaz Maviyane-Davies was able to make anything his imagination could conjure. Two of his most evocative posters are based on three dimensional sculptures he made: a 1996 Southern African Film Festival poster shows a photograph of a reworked traditional style African sculpture with a movie camera lens projecting from its forehead; *Knowledge Will Set You Free*, a 1997 poster for the British Council Libraries, required that Maviyane-Davies build a large set of wings from newspapers stretched over a wire frame, then stand a nude black man in front of the wings. The resulting image is both literate and visceral. And yet Maviyane-Davies can make an equally powerful poster using nothing but typography.

His most famous work is the widely collected and published series he did at his own expense based on the UN Articles of Human Rights. Although it is hard to single out one, a favourite of mine is that for Article 29, *Everyone Has a Duty to the Community and the Environment*, an evocative blend of a tropical plant, a golden hawk, a fish, and a hopeful African face.

The commercial work of Chaz Maviyane-Davies shows no less commitment and richness. His 1998 British Council poster for musician Andy Sheppard intertwines a greater kudu horn with the saxophone. The background is of early southern African cave paintings.

At this writing, just before the 2002 Zimbabwean elections, Chaz Maviyane-Davies is creating and sending out at least one image a day to point out the need for social and political change in his country. Despite the pressure of production, teaching, lecturing and trying to answer a multitude of e-mails from around the world, he has not let up. And he is remaining true to his heritage. In particular, I find Portals of Truth 25, 26, 27, 28, 30 and 31 are all very powerful. We will be putting them up in the foyer of Mass Art for all of our students to see.

It is amazing that Chaz Maviyane-Davies' work can be so simple in the basic message, yet reveal so many layers of meaning. His mastery of photography, prop building and typography are combined with seamless computer manipulation. The result is work that has immediate and universal appeal, regardless of the audience. He has channelled his anger for injustice into a steadily burning ember that results in timeless, memorable posters. ⚡

(right) Misheck Masamvu
History Begets Response, 2001
 63 x 51cm, oil on paper

(middle) Patrick Makumbe
Love Triangle
 84,1 x 62cm, oil on paper

(bottom) Lovemore Kambudzi
Childhood, 2002
 oil on canvas



Gallery Delta



Gallery Delta

Deprivation



Gallery Delta

Degradation

Chiedza Musengezi, the Director of Zimbabwe Women Writers, visits an exhibition of paintings inspired by Zimbabwe's recent election.

Decimation

Gallery Delta's exhibition to mark the March 2002 presidential election comprised forty selected paintings by Lovemore Kambudzi, Patrick Makumbe and Misheck Masamvu. The collection offered an extraordinary testimony to the socio-political and economic state of the nation. The young painters explored the way people feel and think by presenting revealing images of what it means to live with degradation, decimation and deprivation; conditions which according to a contemporary Danish sculptor, Jens Christophersen, give birth to an animal of very low instincts that he calls the 'inner beast'. Given the right conditions, he argues, the 'inner beast' can reside in you and I and any individual anywhere in the world; it attacks the foundation of one's ethical and moral values so that intolerance, xenophobia and racism take over. Kambudzi, Makumbe and Masamvu bring us face to face with our 'inner beast', their paintings reflecting a thematic coherence around poverty, destruction and moral degradation.

Lovemore Kambudzi was born in 1978 in Chitungwiza and now lives in Mbare, Harare. He communicates his presence in a deprived urban environment by sharing with the viewers areas of human experience that he is part of. Anthony Chennells described his paintings (in *Gallery 28*) as 'satirical' because of the way the human figures are exaggerated, if not caricatured, to underline the absence of basic essentials in life: food, shelter and dignity. Kambudzi highlights the lack of basic housing for the poor by depicting images inspired by everyday scenes from the western high-density suburbs of Zimbabwean cities where people use every means at their disposal to create alternative accommodation. For shelter, people construct makeshift shacks out of a variety of materials that include wood, sticks, old sacking, plastic and tin cans beaten out flat and nailed together into metal sheets. Shacks form the background to most

of the paintings that were selected for this exhibition. In *Self Employment*, *Looting*, *Matapi Kitchen* and *Childhood* row upon monotonous row of shacks stretching as far as the eye can see invoke the viewer's revulsion. The sameness and gloom of the shacks are emphasised by a restricted palette of greens and browns, reminiscent of military camouflage uniform. The unity of the painter's selection also puts a spotlight on what he wants the viewer to reflect upon: the enormous suffering of the poor, the alleviation of which calls for the total commitment of the incoming president.

In the foreground of his paintings Kambudzi presents insightful examples of urban deprivation. *Childhood* depicts the most vulnerable of the poor, as they mimic the struggles of adult life. Their enlarged heads and concentrated faces suggest not innocence and joy, but the mature resourcefulness and determination that they need to extract play and pleasure from a barren environment. Their extraordinary inventiveness reveals itself in the details of the wire cars, with their seats and headlights. *Self Employment* speaks of the widespread unemployment in the country following the closure of factories and the disruption of commercial agriculture. For the urban poor, self-employment often means getting hold of anything sellable, and firewood is one such item. The newly settled farmers turn to the nearest means of survival – cutting down trees and selling the wood. The felled tree in the foreground of the painting is testimony to the environmental decimation that is taking place throughout the wooded areas of the country that have been opened up for land re-distribution. Paraffin and electricity – fuels of city dwellers when available – are beyond the lean purses of the poor. Eyes smart at the slightest imagination of wet wood burning.

Looting shows how desperate people can be driven to extremes when in the grip of basic

food shortages. The animal of low instincts that thrives in a deprived environment is sufficiently grown to break free, resulting in looting. The residents of the shacks in the background have broken into a supermarket to help themselves. They run away, their backs strained under the weight of bags of maize meal. *Matapi Kitchen* depicts a large shelter that serves as a kitchen for women who provide an affordable meal to residents of the crowded Matapi hostels in Harare, many of whom do not have cooking space. The kitchen floor is alight with cooking fires. Women tend their cooking pots while some serve food to customers. It is a busy scene suggesting a preoccupation with survival.

When asked why he painted the pictures discussed here, Kambudzi replied, '*Handingavanze chokwadi*' ('I can't hide the truth'). He presents us with the truth of the living conditions of the poor in Zimbabwe today. It is alarming to think how widespread these conditions are when we consider that the majority of the population now lives below the poverty line. The visual images of these conditions do not inspire hope, but rather a violent rejection that has the potential to generate emotional and physical energy to deal with the problem.

The paintings of Patrick Makumbe convey a deep concern with eroded morals. Female figures dominate his compositions. Nudes with make-up on their faces and large hoops in their ears are laid out before the viewers in a variety of postures, all of which suggest sexual availability. Looked at through the eyes of the majority of Zimbabwean men, even the clothed women convey the same message, with short dresses hardly covering their thighs. In *Sixty-five Dollars Please* a young woman dressed in a short red dress with a very low neckline carries a tray holding a bottle and a wine-glass. She seems poised to seduce her customers.



The male figures in Makumbe's paintings also reinforce debasement. The man in *Love Triangle* wears a black suit and a black hat, holds a briefcase in one hand, and has two women in lacy bikinis draped on either side of him, proof of his indulgence in sexual pleasures. The painting is a strong statement on the sexual exploitation of women by well-off men. Prostitution, according to Virginia Phiri in her recently published novel, *Desperate*, is an act of desperation for most women. With no other source of income, their bodies become a commodity for men who can afford to buy sex; and, as Phiri says, it does not come cheap. Even the decent looking man in a suit sitting thoughtfully at his breakfast table in *Meditation* has a framed nude on the wall. One wonders what he thinks about as he has his morning coffee.



Gallery Delta

However, it is in *Caught Up* that Makumbe admonishes the degrading situations that he presents. A man and a woman snuggle under a blue blanket; they are in a deep sleep, the intimacy of their encounter reinforced by their heads sharing a pillow. There is tension in this seemingly peaceful situation. A woman stands alone in the doorway, through which daylight streams, and looks on disapprovingly. The painter said it was inspired by an experience very early in his life when his mother turned up unexpectedly from the rural areas and found his father sharing a bed with another woman. 'I do not know why I cannot forget this scene which I witnessed when I was very young.' Makumbe was born in 1978, and his reflections are a testimony to the impressionable nature of a child's mind. We do not need to know the personal story in order to appreciate this painting, for we know the two worlds that many men inhabit in Zimbabwe, the rural and the urban. With jobs that do not pay enough to secure a home in the city, they keep their wives and children at the rural home while they rent a room in the city. Away from their wives these men turn to commercial sex workers for company. Women, such as the one standing in the doorway, are the ones on whom society has placed the burden of upholding values and morals. Prostitution is as old as mankind but its prevalence escalates in deprived environments. Men with a taste for low pleasures, along with women who can provide sex for a fee, pose a danger at a time when HIV/AIDS is haunting the nation.



Gallery Delta

(above) Lovemore Kambudzi
Looting, 2002
oil on canvas

(middle) Patrick Makumbe
Meditation, 2002
75 x 60cm, oil on paper

(right) Patrick Makumbe
Portrait of a Dancer, 2002
oil on paper

The serene and beautiful *Portrait of a Dancer* offers possibilities of dignity in a potentially degrading environment. Wrapped in a close-fitting red dress the dancer's slim, smooth body evokes a respectful sensuality. Many paintings awaken our sense of sight, but the appeal of *Portrait of a Dancer* goes beyond our eyes, drawing us into the



Gallery Delta

Misheck Masamvu
The Shadow of Truth, 2002
65 x 55cm, oil on paper

Misheck Masamvu
Immortalised in the Image of Man, 2002
65 x 57cm, oil on paper




Gallery Delta

pleasure of the dance, and of the music as well. It is the kind of painting that can easily find its way to the wall of a living room, and it was bought on the first day of public viewing.

Of the three painters on show, Misheck Masamvu best captures the violence and destruction that characterised the pre-election period. He was born in 1980 in Marondera and now lives in Harare. With his disturbingly powerful images of decapitated heads, severed limbs, torsos and blood he condemns the destruction of human life with the uncompromising hardness of youth. Some of his images are gruesome; but so indeed were some of the politically motivated events that he commemorates.

In *Shadow of Death*, the torso of a freshly killed person sits on a television set, drops of blood emphasising the immediacy of the murder. A decapitated bandaged head hangs on a hook in front of the television. The hook can read as a question mark: Whose head is it? Why kill? Is this the price we must pay for democracy? The images symbolise the extreme intolerance of political parties which resort to abduction, intimidation and murder. Perhaps the conditions for the propagation of Christophersen's inner beast are so favourable that it has taken over a whole nation. The text that accompanies these images reinforces the painters' disapproval of violence.

History Begets Response implies the continuation of violence and anarchy should those who choose to aid themselves with such means get into power. A severed head rests on a white pillow. The lower part of a man sitting on a bed in whose lap the pillow rests suggests that the man's fears and worries have been vindicated. However, a door in the backs indicates a possible exit out of the hellish situation. *Raindrop on a Dry Heart* may hold the answer, and offer relief to the widespread suffering. It advocates the power of a free and fair election with a pair of strong feet – perhaps belonging to the winner – firmly planted on a ballot box. The upper part of a man is visible. He holds a poster on which scribbled text speaks directly to the main political parties in the presidential race, Zanu(PF) and MDC. Masamvu's palette is dominated by red, signifying danger. His compositions are uncluttered and impossible to overlook.

Artists have a role to play in crucially important issues. Kambudzi, Makumbe and Masamvu aired their concerns prior to the presidential elections. They want an end to deprivation and degradation. So do we all. 



Jane Stillwell



Jane Stillwell

Helen Lieros *at home*

Helen Lieros is one of Zimbabwe's finest painters and is amongst its most enthusiastic teachers of art. Seven years ago the then Editor of *Gallery*, Barbara Murray, interviewed her and asked if her youthful admiration of Oskar Kokoschka was in any way related to expressive turmoil of her own painting.

Maybe that's the Greek part of me coming out. Probably the drama. I feel that the biggest thing in my life is to try and be an individual and try and identify who I really am. It is a battle in my life, in my work, this identity. Am I Greek? Am I African? And yet there is a link in the superstitions of the Greek and of the African. The relationship is very similar in many, many ways. And to be accepted as a Greek or as a white African ... I feel that this has been really my biggest fight.

Helen Lieros was born in Gweru, the capital of Zimbabwe's Midlands Province, in 1940. Sixteen years earlier, her merchant seaman father had been shipwrecked off Cape Town; during the wait for a replacement vessel to take him home to the Greek island of Sérifos, he accepted the invitation of an old friend to visit Rhodesia. As Helen Lieros recounts it, 'He came here, and that was it ... he went back and said to his captain, "I want to be paid out; I don't want to carry on." And that's how he came to be here. He had travelled all over the world, and was always looking for a country where he wasn't an alien.'

Her mother's route south was equally unlikely. Like Lieros's father, she was an orphan, and she was brought up by her grandmother.

My mother was in Greek drama school, in her final year. It wasn't the thing in those days for a girl of good family to go to ancient Greek drama school; she worked out a system with her best friend, so that everyone thought she was going to the gym, and in the meantime she was studying drama.

In keeping with her spirited nature, and through a contact made by a relative, she began corresponding with her castaway compatriot in Rhodesia. 'You're an orphan, and I'm an orphan,' he wrote, 'Come and marry me!'

Gweru was probably more touched than most Rhodesian towns by the events of World War Two, with pilots from Europe and Australia

joining local men at the airbases of Moffat and Thornhill. 'Although we weren't directly involved,' Lieros recalls, 'this whole cloud hung around us.'

If the active engagement of Africa in a distant European war was one reminder of the bizarre geopolitics of the colonial world, the issue of language was another. Gweru sits squarely between the Ndebele and Shona-speaking parts of the country, and by the middle of the century more and more people were speaking English as a second or third language. And in the Lieros household?

Life was Gweru, and life was Greek. At home we never ever spoke any other language except Greek. It was the first language I learnt; I was not allowed to speak one word of English. I didn't know any English, to be quite honest, until I was six years old. It was very hard for me to go to kindergarten, but I had a wonderful teacher, who was my mother's best friend, and mine, and she taught me to speak English. But at home it was Greek.

Unlike today, there was no Greek school in the country; and certainly not in Gweru. Lieros attended Chaplin High School, where the headmaster at the time was a classicist. If the mild, intra-European racism of the times intruded on the young Helen's life ('It was a British colony after all, and many times we were referred to as "the bloody Greeks"', he reinforced the message of her mother, that she came 'from a history of culture'. 'My mother used to say that when Greece was building the Parthenon, the British were still cannibals.'

Notwithstanding its 'history of culture', the Greek community had a general disdain for girls'



Derek Huggins

Helen Lieros
Odes and Prayers, 1998
mixed media

education. Lieros and her younger sister, Mary, learned much from their mother about classical drama, literature and philosophy, and at Chaplin School she focused her early creative energies on music, rather than painting.

I played the piano. Mostly musicians I didn't like. Because of the speed in my fingers, I was pumped with Bach. I hate Bach to this day. I always wanted to write music, but I knew my limitations. Then all of a sudden, when I was about fifteen, art came into my life, and I found that I could express myself that way. And there was a link with music – because even when I was working with music, the sounds were colours. I was fascinated. If I played something that I really loved, it was full of colours, and of the things that were happening within me as a young girl.

In an academic sense, music continued its dominance through to the end of her school days, at which time she battled with her father over what was to follow. He wanted her to study music in South Africa (it was at his insistence that she had taken Afrikaans as a second language at school); she was determined to study art. 'Then my father wrote to his cousin in Greece, who happens to have studied architecture in Lausanne, and he writes back and says that there's a wonderful art school in Geneva ...'

Lieros was in Geneva from 1958 to 1962.

It was beautiful. It got rid of all my hang-ups, my complexes. There were no ethnic differences. I couldn't speak the language at the beginning, but there was an integrity about everything, I found. I was accepted as one of them. I mean, I was this little girl from Gweru, naïve as anything, I can't tell you – even arriving there with little white socks, when everybody was wearing stockings and pantyhose! It was like another world, and the discovery of that was magnificent.

In the first year you do everything, especially drawing. We did design, sculpture and painting, and I was very close to the sculpture. I liked the sculpture element, you know, and of course they were working with granite. I had a fantastic doyen, and I asked him, 'Do you think I should go and major in sculpture?' and he said, 'No, you're a painter. I've seen your works.' So I decided to go into painting. The history of art was the worst, because of the language. I didn't mix with English-speaking people. I refused to mix with English-speaking people. So the barrier of the language was strong.

And the painting?

I was painting what they wanted me to paint, and I had to use the colours they wanted me to use, the 'Swiss' colours: the greys, the beiges. If I would

use red – which I was dying to do – they would make me cross-hatch grey over it, to subdue it. It was a very formal kind of education. And the lecturers hated each other, so that you went into one class and he opposed the other ones. You had to somehow change your identity to please the professor.

Armed with her degree, and a scholarship awarded by the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Roy Welensky's personal interest in the young Rhodesian art student was one of his last acts as Prime Minister before the Federation was dissolved), Lieros proceeded to Florence for a year. Her main area of study was fresco painting; not the fresco secco, which is painted on dry plaster, but the true, buon fresco, perfected in 16th century Italy, in which the pigment is applied to damp plaster and becomes integrated into the structure of the wall itself. As in Geneva, there was a tendency for students to have to parrot their teachers' views, rather than develop their own, and several months of study fell victim to strikes ('The Christian Democrats were on strike. The Fascisti were on strike. The Comministi were on strike ... so we lost out'), but the galleries and palaces of the city offered rich recompense.

Lieros returned to Rhodesia in 1964, at her mother's request.

I came home. I came back to Gweru. I had no job. I was exhausted, disillusioned. What was I going to do? I wanted to be an artist. I wanted to be a painter. I remember Geoffrey Atkins interviewing me on television; I had a wonderful rapport with him, and asked, 'Do you think I could work here at the television studio, doing murals?' and he said, 'Forget about it, you're an artist. Why don't you consider teaching?' I went back to my headmaster at Chaplin. 'Sir, you know, I was thinking – maybe I should go into teaching and get back to the school?' He was delighted. So a door opened for me. But it was an alien thing, trying to teach ... it was like discovering and working out something again. On the sideline I was still painting. Even when I'd given them something to do, I would walk to my little easel on the side and work away, and then walk around again. I think that rapport – that the teacher was painting as well – made it interesting for the kids.

After three years of teaching, Lieros married and moved to Harare with her husband, Derek Huggins ('He was a gentleman. He loved literature. There was something in him that I had not found in other people...'). She was offered, and accepted, a commission from the Greek Archbishop to paint some murals in his church. Her father was already living and working in Harare, and her mother joined him as soon as Mary finished her schooling in Gweru.

The mid-sixties ushered a heightened sense of tension into the country, and saw the proclamation of Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Looking back, Lieros claims that, 'I never was really political', but the strength of the values she absorbed from her upbringing and her experience suggest otherwise.

Why, she wondered during her teaching days at Chaplin, did the students have to learn French and Afrikaans, when they should have concentrated – in the nineteen-sixties, of all times – on Shona, Ndebele and Karanga? Living, as she effectively did, in the medium of a second language herself, her ideology was totally different from that which prevailed at the time.

Her childhood, it's true, was marked by the consciousness of national differences, but it wasn't in any way scarred by them. The cosmopolitan years in Geneva left a different sort of mark: '... the race thing, of being a Greek or Spanish or black American or



Luis Blasco

whatever else was there ... there was nothing of that, I never sensed it. And when I came home, there was this sort of discovery of what was going on, which did not really please me.'

After completing the Church commission, and after taking Derek on an introductory trip to continental Europe, Lieros returned to teaching, in private schools and colleges and in her own studio.

I didn't want to go back to the government system of education. I tried to break away from the formula that was stuck on me when I was a student in Geneva and in Italy. I wanted individuals to be able to express themselves. To find out what each student wants, what kind of field, whether graphics or design or painting or sculpture. You had more rapport that way – and at the same time you discover yourself. I was intrigued with the situation. I discovered Zimbabwe all over again. I discovered those colours that they were suppressing and they were killing when I was trying to use them as a student in Geneva. They all became alive, this wonderful continent of reds and blues, all the colours that I was dying to use all these years. All the elements of my childhood returned with the discovery of the colour, and the space.

But I battled. I battled for about ten years to really identify with myself. Also, I blessed sanctions. We couldn't get paper. We couldn't get canvas. We had to improvise materials, we had to find new ways in order to paint. We were joining paper, that's when we started doing collage. My sister's husband,

Peter, started making oil paints. There was a unity amongst the artists. We shared everything. There was a determination to explore whatever was available. I think, literally, it was 1974 when I became an artist, in other words that's when I discovered something. It was, again, because of improvisation. I feel that this was so important, to discover Africa. My subjects were all about Africa and the war, it was very politically oriented in a symbolic way.

The late 1970s were absorbed by teaching, painting, the cultivation of artistic links, and tending the young roots of Gallery Delta, which Derek Huggins had opened in 1975. Then, in 1980, came Independence.

I was very optimistic. I felt that the change had to be. I felt that justice had to prevail. And I must admit that I was proud of being here, the way it happened. I was pleased that there were no extremities. I hate extremes of any sort, whether this side or that side. Everything was taking its course. A lot of doors opened for the artists, overseas, whereas before we were under sanctions. There was a focus. It was around that time, or just before, when the young black painters made their mark. They'd been around before then – Charles Fernandes, Thomas Mu, Kingsley Sambo – but they were pushed to one side by all the attention on sculpture, and I felt that was very unfair.

The popular emphasis on sculpture at the expense of painting has been aggravated by the generally low priority given to the arts in education in Zimbabwe. Having taught in state schools and private colleges, and in the informal environment of Gallery Delta's amphitheatre, how does Helen Lieros's approach to students differ from the way she learned herself?

We all need basic training, right? How to draw. How to use colour. But you can't impose yourself. I will never touch a student's painting. I will show it to them on another piece of paper. Because it was done to me, with a big cross, 'This is crap ... you've got to paint like that'. I will never do it!

(right) Helen Lieros
African Icon, 2000
 mixed media

(below) Helen Lieros
Suspended Totem, 2002
 mixed media and recycled egg boxes



Derek Huggins



Derek Huggins

There is no formula, and that's what worries me, that all of a sudden there might become a kind of a formula. Also, there is the question of survival: you have the artist dividing himself between his creative work, and the pretty pictures he knows he can sell to make his bread and butter. I feel, somehow, that it is destructive. You have to try and keep your integrity as an artist, whatever way you have to make a bit of side money. You can get a cup and do beautiful paintings and sell them, that is still part of you. You can illustrate. You can make beautiful cards and sell them. During this crisis, this economical crisis, we are feeling sorry for ourselves, and we are not using our imagination, our talent, in order to make certain things that we can survive on.

'We' ... 'our' ... Where are these words rooted?

I am getting older now, and I am trying to re-identify to the beginning of my life... all that had happened to me as a child, my identity as a Greek. It has a lot to do with the murals that I've been doing in Mozambique [in the Orthodox Church in Maputo], going to Greece and researching, and also discovering things which I had not discovered before. But I was born here. I am a Zimbabwean by birth. You can never, ever take that away from me. No government, no one, only God can take that away from me. I was born here. But you can't also make me denounce my parents, who are Greek. If you are maKaranga and you have got an Ndebele father or mother, you are of that. You can't denounce. But you can't take Africa, and the country that has given me everything, away from me. I will always be loyal to this part of the world. But you can't also take away my blood, which is Greek.

Can the tension between those two be positive?

It's very positive. There are so many things from the Greek superstitions and beliefs that are similar to African ones. The breaking of the pot: the breaking of the amphora, when you are dead. You've got the goats: in our religion, for forty days we don't eat any meat, then a goat is sacrificed and we have a feast on a spit and then we eat the goat. I am talking about in Greece. Here in Zimbabwe we also sacrifice goats. There is so much that you discover as you grow up; I love listening to people telling me about the myths of the Shona and the Ndebele. I am intrigued with them. There are so many things, funnily enough, which are in Greek mythology and also in superstition here. The owl, for instance, the zizi, is bad luck here; in Greece it is wisdom but it is also bad luck. So there's a link up somehow along the line.

Have other artists here been affected by the geography of their lives?

Paul Wade. Paul was a textile man when he came here; he did the most amazing sculptured textiles, in bright colours – he was avant garde in that time. And then he went back to starting to paint here. That's when he got really good.

I think I am very fortunate is that I have watched and observed these people from the beginning. Like Thakor [Patel] and Paul, for example. The progression and explosion in their work. When Thakor first came here, he painted little black and white figures; there was pain in these beautiful drawings that he had done. And he was working small. Then, the symbolism from the Indian rugs and carpets emerged, and his own history came out. He started exploring. So it's been fantastic – I am privileged because I have seen the progression of the artists.

So, can there be such a thing as an 'African' artist?

My point is very basic here. Western civilisation has a very preconceived idea of what African art is. I noticed that in the Africa 95 festival in England, where they chose what they thought was African. Let's put it this way: people often expect black Africans to do naïve work. They never expect them to do abstract art, or the sort of exploration being done by young artists living in Africa. On the other hand, there are so many Africans living in Italy, France, Germany, working as African artists, and they are the ones that have lost their identity, have succumbed to the so-called Western trend of art. So if you go to the Biennale in Senegal, or in Sao Paulo, you have lost the identity, the smell, the colour of Africa and South America. This is my own personal philosophy of what is happening. Of course, art has to be international. You can say it comes from Africa, it comes from Spain, it comes from here, it comes from there. That has to be. But in Zimbabwe, we all have the rub-off of Africa in our work, because we were born here. ♡



Jane Stilwell

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